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ABSTRACT

Franklin as a statesman, Rush as a physician, and Webster as a linguist and political commentator believed in a "general diffusion of knowledge" and wrote liberally on education. They sincerely believed in education as a civilizing agent, so all three helped found schools and colleges. Franklin's interests were educational philosophy; starting an academy school (vocational-technological); language; and female, black, and adult education. Rush was concerned with educational and political aims, elementary instruction, discipline, education of females and blacks, medical education, and higher education. Webster influenced educational aims, religious and moral education, female education, teaching, and the Americanization of English. Much of what they fought for is in effect today. (Author/ND)

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THREE EARLY CHAMPIONS OF EDUCATION: BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, BENJAMIN RUSH, AND NOAH WEBSTER

Abraham Blinderman

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FASTBACK 74

BICENTENNIAL SERIES

Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation

ABRAHAM BLINDERMAN

Abraham Blinderman earned his bachelor's degree from Brooklyn College and master's and doctor's degrees from New York University.

He has been an English teacher since 1948 and is currently a professor at the State University of New York, Farmingdale Campus.

He is the author of numerous journal articles and of two books, *American Writers on Education Before 1865*, (1975) and *American Writers on Education after 1865* (1976).

Blinderman is married and has two children, both teachers.

Series Editor, Donald W. Robinson

THREE EARLY CHAMPIONS OF EDUCATION: Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Rush, and Noah Webster

By Abraham Blinderman

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FOREWORD

The two Benjamins, Noah Webster, and other colonial leaders, including Thomas Jefferson who is treated in another fastback, are examples of the intellect, the broad social concerns, and the striking dedication that characterized American leadership during our revolutionary era. Indeed, only a few societies in crucial periods of history have been so blessed with creative personalities able to inspire giant steps forward. Frequently they held varying opinions but the negotiated or blended results often proved positive and fruitful. Jefferson, for example, born of plantation stock, favored a public system of education, while Franklin, son of a poor soap and candle maker, evidenced no concern for a public system, yet gradually a structure accommodating both public and private schooling emerged. Rush and Webster both had strong nationalistic propensities but advocated different means for attaining national loyalty through schooling. All busy and involved men moving in the highest circles—how in retrospect can we account for the time and energy they gave to educational matters? Clearly, they recognized the fundamental need in a free state for an educated citizenry.

Franklin also perceived the need for adult education and is justly credited as one of the fathers of the American library system. He was, as well, a significant promoter of the more informal means of learning, which were so important during a period when mass schooling had not as yet been assured. From John Adams and James Madison to Joel Barlow and Philip Freneau we have a strong coterie of individuals who in a variety of ways established a sound foundation for American education.

Dr. Blinderman has the space to treat only three of these individuals; but his presentation provides an illuminating review of the qualities of these American leaders who did so much to further the early tuition of the Republic.

Richard E. Gross
Stanford, California

INTRODUCTION

Although almost half of the delegates assembled at Independence Hall in Philadelphia on May 25, 1787, to draft a federal Constitution for the newly emancipated colonies were college graduates, none of them introduced educational resolutions during the proceedings. Even Thomas Jefferson, then in Europe on state business might not have championed a federal educational system in those critical days. Union was paramount and Jefferson had earlier demonstrated his willingness to trim his political sails in the name of national unity by deleting his antislavery article from the original draft of the Declaration of Independence. Undoubtedly, most of the delegates were willing to have their respective states shape the educational destiny of the nation. Benjamin Franklin, who signed the Declaration and the Constitution, exhorted his countrymen to firm the nation's economic base since "all things have their season, and with young countries as with young men, you must curb their fancy to strengthen their judgment . . . thus poetry, painting, music (and the stage as their embodiment), are all necessary and proper qualifications of a refined state of society, but objectionable at an earlier period, since their cultivation would make a taste for their enjoyment preclude their means." More impatient than Franklin to enjoy the flowering of American culture, Noah Webster realized that intellectual and artistic achievement of a high order cannot be easily attained in a new nation. But he called for American divorcement from European cultural influences in this challenge to his countrymen:

> This country must at some future time be as distinguished by the superiority of literary improvements as she is already by the liber-

> ality of her civil and ecclesiastical institutions. Europe is grown old in folly, corruption, and tyranny—in that country, laws are perverted, manners are licentious, literature is declining, and human nature is debased. For America in her infancy to adopt the present maxims of the Old World would be to stamp the wrinkle of decrepit age upon the bloom of youth, and to plant the seed of decay into a vigorous constitution.

The new nation had to secure its borders, improve its agriculture, industry, and commerce, and insure domestic tranquility. The Founding Fathers believed almost religiously in a "general diffusion of knowledge" to insure its existence and prosperity. Washington, the Adamses, Hamilton, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, Franklin, Benjamin Rush, and Noah Webster wrote repeatedly on educational themes. Belletrists, among them Joel Barlow, Philip Freneau, Hugh Henry Breckenridge, Royall Tyler, John Trumbull, and Charles Brockden Brown, wrote on educational themes in their essays, poems, and novels, but the basic educational thinking of the revolutionary period lies in the state papers and letters of the Founding Fathers.

Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Rush, and Noah Webster wrote liberally on education. The self-taught Franklin and the university-trained Rush and Webster had much in common. They were curious, diligent, and successful questers of knowledge. Franklin's notions on disease were modern, especially his conjectures on the common cold. Webster was a pioneer in statistical epidemiology whose work won Rush's approbation. All three founded or helped to found schools and colleges. Franklin's academy evolved into the University of Pennsylvania; Dr. Rush labored heroically to establish Dickinson College, and Noah Webster assisted at the birth of Amherst College. Rush and Franklin minimized the classics, spoke out against the unreasonable application of the ferule to tender backsides, and advocated schooling for blacks. Franklin and Rush were outspoken against slavery; Webster's abolitionism was more tepid.

Rush dedicated his medical dissertation on human digestion to Benjamin Franklin, and not to be outdone by the physician, lexicographer Webster dedicated his *Dissertation on the English Language* to the much-honored doctor. Rush was consistent in his praise of Franklin, but when he was eighty, Franklin begged the effusive Rush to dilute his written accolades which embar-

rassed him. Although Webster had termed Franklin a man of small erudition in 1768, Franklin apparently had forgiven Webster by 1789, for he attributed the preservation of the purity of English to Webster's tireless popularization of linguistic propriety. Franklin's utilitarian educational projects, Rush's zeal in founding colleges and introducing moral and religious tones in the nation's schools, and Webster's prodigious output of textbooks and dictionaries significantly influenced the course of American education. Franklin signed both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, and Rush signed the Declaration. Webster's interests led him away from seeking national offices; although he wrote Federalist tracts and communicated with the nation's leaders, his major claim for inclusion among the select Founding Fathers is his well-earned sobriquet, "Schoolmaster to the nation."

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN (1706-1790)

Franklin, Jefferson, John Adams, and Hamilton produced a massive literature which is the epitomization of the American enlightenment. Considering that Franklin's education included only one year at the Boston Latin Grammar School and a brief tenure at George Brownell's business school, where he failed arithmetic, it is astonishing that the faltering lad evolved into a versatile shaper of American destiny.

His literary gamut is broad. Undoubtedly, many readers innocent of Franklin's amorous and scatalogical drolleries probably read in disbelief when they chance upon his indiscreet essays. But a genius who wrote on political science, the genesis of the common cold, the properties of electricity, the pot-bellied stove, the gout, the landing of infantry by balloons behind enemy lines, the need for limitations of arms, and the establishment of schools, colleges, hospitals, and libraries may be allowed his moments of respite from literary solemnity.

Franklin's Educational Philosophy

Franklin read Defoe's "Essay upon Projects" in his youth and his educational beliefs were greatly influenced by Defoe's advocacy of academies, professional schools, and colleges for girls. He rejected the doctrine of innate ideas, believing that personality is largely shaped by one's environment. In a letter to Samuel

Adams in 1750, Franklin epitomized his educational Philosophy: "I think with you, that nothing is more important for the public weal, than to form and train up youth in wisdom and virtue. Wise and good men, are, in my opinion, the strength of the state; much more so than riches or arms, which under the management of ignorance and wickedness, often draw on destruction, instead of providing for the safety of the public."

The old education, he thought, was useless. It had never suppressed man's bestiality. Why not divorce education from religion and tradition, make it pleasurable, and eliminate fear from the teaching process? Dogmatic teachers perpetuate evil. Children thrive on praise and prizes; the birch-rod rarely turns out wholesome scholars. But to satisfy religious groups in the community, Franklin recommended teaching moral science. Like Luther, he believed that it is easier to educate youth than to cure adults.

Oddly, Franklin who was the paragon of self-educated men, wrote in *Poor Richard's Almanac* "Learn of the skilful: He that teaches himself, hath a fool for his master." Was he self-conscious because he lacked degrees? As a printer's devil of sixteen, he had lashed out at Harvard College in a series of articles that his brother printed as the "Silence Dogood Papers" in *The New England Courant*. The fourth essay, "A Dream of Harvard College," anticipated John Trumbull's roasting of Yale College in "The Progress of Dulness" (1770). Silence depicted Harvard College in 1722 as a snobbish school for the progeny of the rich. Religious hypocrisy, suppression of free speech, and mediocre, impoverished teachers turned out "Beetle Sculls" at commencement no wiser than they were as entering freshmen. Parents unwisely sent their dullards to school instead of apprenticing them to tradesmen. The college made them mercenary. Seniors wrote papers for lower classmen who generally turned out to be commercial travelers.

But Franklin made his peace with Harvard when the maligned school awarded him an honorary degree. Yale, Oxford, and St. Andrews also honored him with degrees and the Royal Society embraced him as well. Perhaps fame was the spur that calmed Franklin's jealous breast. Recognized as an equal by his academic friends, he divested himself of his earlier collegiate animus and learned to commune as an equal with his academic brethren.

Franklin and the Academy Idea

Aware that the expanding colonies would need skilled craftsmen, technicians, businessmen, and agriculturists, Franklin envisioned for many years the establishment of an academy in Philadelphia that would train young people for gainful labor. Finally, in 1749, he anonymously summed up his practical educational theories in an innovative pamphlet, "Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania," modestly "avoiding as much as I could, according to my usual Rule, the presenting myself to the Publick as the Author of any scheme for their Benefit." An excellent fund raiser, Franklin solicited the help of wealthy and influential Philadelphians to incorporate an academy, oversee its activities, and assist the masters to look upon the students as their own children. Franklin had progressive plans for his school. The academy had to be properly housed on property surrounded by meadows and orchards. To interest the students in learning, there was to be a liberal expenditure on maps, books, and scientific apparatus. To insure that the students would have good health, he recommended temperate diets, exercises, including running, leaping, wrestling, and swimming. Since most of the graduates would not go to college, Franklin outlined a practical curriculum that would include all that is useful and ornamental. The students would benefit from arithmetic, accounting, geometry, astronomy, English grammar, writing, public speaking, and histories of mechanics, natural philosophy, and agriculture. Latin and Greek would be useless for terminal students but Franklin included the classics for those who desired them.

When the academy opened in 1751, Franklin's dream was not fully realized. In his paper, "Idea of an English School," he had subordinated the teaching of Latin and Greek to the teaching of English. But the Anglican Reverend William Smith, whom Franklin had supported to head the Philadelphia Academy, was an adamant classicist who gradually diminished the English department of the school. In 1755, the academy was rechartered as the College, Academy, and Charitable School of Philadelphia. Because of Smith's neglect of the English school, Franklin began to despise him. James Parton accuses Franklin of being ignorant of the operation of schools and of being subservient to the tenets of wealthy trustees. Since the English school needed better teachers for its

practical courses in mathematics, modern languages, and natural sciences, President Smith probably preferred to favor his classical masters. In illustration, the Latin master was paid 200 pounds annually to teach twenty students; the English master received only 100 pounds annually to teach forty students. The Latin master was given 100 pounds to expend on books and maps; the English master, nothing. After forty years the English school was dropped. The enmity of the two scholars continued. Finally, in 1759, Smith uncharitably wrote to Dr. Thomas Fry, president of St. John's College of Oxford, to prevent Franklin from having a degree bestowed upon him. Later in life, Smith mellowed towards Franklin, and when his former enemy died, Smith eulogized him movingly.

Historically, Franklin's academy is important because it instituted a teacher training program for poor students. Since rural districts had poor schoolmasters, many of them vicious, imported servants, Franklin proposed that the Charitable school send its graduates to farm areas to teach children reading, writing, arithmetic, and grammar. In addition, as the academy prospered and evolved into the University of Pennsylvania, it established the nation's first chair in botany and instituted the nation's first systematic instruction in medicine.

Franklin on Language

Franklin's criticism of reading, "Our boys often read as parrots speak, knowing little or nothing of the meaning," is still made by today's critics of reading instruction. Since speech comes prior to writing, speech moves faster than writing. Therefore, he argued, writing must adapt itself to speech. Perhaps students did not understand what they read because the language of the school books was not the language of the schoolboy.

Franklin was an iconoclast on the subject of modern languages versus the ancient tongues. Since young people rarely use or remember Latin, he advised that the modern languages be taught to most students before they attempt to master Latin. In brief, Franklin believed "that all intended for divinity should be taught Latin and Greek; for physic, the Latin, Greek, and French; merchants, the French, German, and Spanish; and though all should not be compelled to learn the Latin, Greek, or the modern foreign languages, yet none that have an ardent desire to learn

them should be refused," an early foreshadowing of the elective principle in education. But as Franklin aged, he grew fonder of the classics: "It has been of late too much the mode to slight the learning of the ancients," he wrote in 1773. But as he grew less scornful of the ancient tongues, his friend Benjamin Rush became more contemptuous of them.

Franklin was an early critic of the alphabet. He thought that a language that included phonetic anomalies like beaux for bo and tough for tuff needed reform. In 1768 he published "A Scheme for a New Alphabet and a Reformed Mode of Spelling," but was disappointed when Webster wrote that elimination of the characters c, j, q, w, and y, and the introduction of new characters was "neither practicable, necessary, nor expedient." In 1780, Webster reconsidered his criticism of Franklin's spelling reforms, approved them, and acknowledged that Franklin had been on the right track. Unlike Webster, whose entire life was devoted to creating an American English characteristic of American mores, ideals, and customs, Franklin wrote that "we shall always in America make the best English of this Island our standard, and I believe it will be so."

Franklin on Female, Black, and Adult Education

In his "Reflections on Courtship and Marriage" (1750), Franklin wrote: "If women were educated as men they would be as sensible and reasonable." Unfortunately, they were usually uneducated and were courted with "flattery and nonsense," criticisms of female education and status that Ibsen was to highlight in *A Doll's House* more than a century later. For widows, he recommended the study of accounting, a discipline more useful to them than music or dancing, and he saw to it that his daughter Sally was taught French, music, arithmetic, and bookkeeping.

Consistent with his rejection of the doctrine of innate ideas, Franklin attributed the low intellectual state of blacks to slavery and their lack of education. In 1763 he visited the Negro School in Philadelphia, examined the children, praised their progress in reading for the limited time they had been in school, and approved their deportment and attentiveness to their teacher. He wrote of his visit: "I was on the whole much pleas'd and from what I then saw, have conceiv'd a higher Opinion of the natural

Capacities of the black race, then I had ever before entertained. Their Comprehension seems as quick, their Memory as strong, and their Docility in every Respect equal to that of white children." In 1788 he bade that the education of black children be "calculated for situations in life," a recommendation that was almost ignored by American leaders until after the Civil War.

Early in life Franklin had great faith in adult education as a means of assembling conservatives and liberals in discussion groups to solve the nation's problems peacefully. To test his belief in the educational value of discussion groups, he organized in 1723, the Junto, an association of eleven original members sometimes called the Leather Apron Club because of the printers, shoemakers, and mechanics who were liberally represented in the club. The aim of the Junto was to seek out truth for truth's sake, to encourage men to love mankind, and to diminish sectarian biases. The self-educated members participated in topical debates, scientific and philosophical discussions, and scientific investigations. To make the club more sociable, the members set aside dates for picnics, songfests, and declamations.

To assure the Junto that new numbers would be fit to join them, Franklin proposed these questions to the candidates:

> Do you sincerely declare that you love mankind in general of what profession or religion whatsoever?
>
> Do you think any person ought to be harmed in his body, name, or goods for mere speculative opinions or his external ways of worship?
>
> Do you love truth for truth's sake and will you endeavor impartially to find and reserve it for yourself and communicate it to others?

As the club prospered, Franklin conceived the idea of establishing a library for the members. Books were bought for circulation among the members to encourage documentation for the debates. Sydney George Fisher, author of *The True Benjamin Franklin,* praises Franklin for providing inspired young men with "an education which was not altogether an inferior substitute for that furnished by our modern institutions endowed with millions of dollars and officered by plodding professors wearied by years of exhaustive study."

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In 1743 the Junto ascended to intellectual majesty by becoming The American Philosophical Society. Modeled after the Royal Society, the new association applied itself to scientific and technical investigation. It did not neglect education, for after Yorktown it offered a prize for the best essay on establishing an effective system of national education.

Franklin's Influence

Franklin was proud of the progress the young nation had made in education. In 1782 he wrote a tract, "Information to Those Who Would Remove to America," which advised the potential emigrant that there were nine colleges in the states, manned by learned professors who prepared men for the professions of law, physic, and divinity. Strangers were invited to practice in America. For those not interested in collegiate education there were many academies offering courses in many disciplines. Even indentured boys were taught to read, write, and cast accounts.

Perhaps no other man of the founding period has contributed as much to American education as Franklin. His pamphlets, newspaper articles, and almanacs influenced tens of thousands of Americans. To the poor, *Poor Richard's Almanac* was a veritable Bible, but it is conceivable that Franklin's stress on self-education might have discouraged the appetite of many readers for public education. Founder of libraries, schools, and learned societies, advocate of female and black education, champion of civil liberties and religious freedom, and yet sufficiently human to indulge in occasional Rabelaisian excursions, Franklin's manifold contributions to American thought are enormous.

The tendency of financial institutions to represent Franklin as the apostle of thrift has unduly symbolized one characteristic of his personality. Although it is tempting to liken Franklin's rise to success to that of a typical Horatio Alger hero, there is little truth to the analogy. Horatio Alger's heroes are alert and ambitious, but they generally rise to industrial greatness through opportune rescue of a tycoon's daughter or foiling of a dastardly plot upon his person or property. Franklin, on the other hand, planned his life's itinerary, studied diligently, and employed his talents profitably when the times were in joint for him.

BENJAMIN RUSH, M.D. (1745-1813)

Born near Philadelphia three decades before he proudly signed the Declaration of Independence, Benjamin Rush participated fully in the political and intellectual life of the nation he helped fashion. He wrote ardently for emancipation of the slaves, opposed the death penalty and harsh penal abuses, and encouraged the establishment of insane asylums. Although medical historians attack him for his emphasis upon bleeding in therapy, he was after all an eighteenth-century man steeped in the medical lore of his age and perhaps too vain and too traditional to give heed to the physicians who were soon to damn humoral medicine forever. For his age he served well. A kind practitioner who forgave the debts of his indigent clients, he labored heroically during the yellow fever epidemics that plagued Philadelphia in the late eighteenth century and was a pioneer in psychiatry.

Happily for young Rush, his parents sent him to the Nottingham School in Maryland, where he studied under the supervision of Dr. Samuel Finley whom he revered all his life. Finley was a strict but just man who displayed the fearsome ferule but never employed it. He taught arithmetic, geometry, Latin, Greek, and English so well that Rush was able to matriculate as a junior at the College of New Jersey, headed by the Reverend Samuel Davies, another teacher Rush revered. The faculty of four professors taught fifty students who arose at five in the morning, prayed at 5:30, breakfasted, studied, and attended classes from nine to noon.

President Davies encouraged Rush to write but dissuaded him from studying law because of its tendency to tempt its followers

into evil ways. Finally, Rush decided to study medicine, and with President Davies's assistance, was granted an apprenticeship. After six years of practice and study he earned the coveted title of medical doctor. Rush later studied abroad at Edinburgh and at home he attended the lectures of Drs. Shippen and Morgan, eminent physicians of the revolutionary period.

Rush's Educational and Political Aims

A pious man, Rush had thought in his youth of effecting social reform as a minister, but after becoming a physician he elected to initiate social change by participating in reform movements. Convinced that no man is totally depraved, he believed like Franklin that a society that extends love and education to its citizens can improve itself. Only via education might America transform its people into "republican machines." Like Noah Webster, Rush argued that the aim of republican education "is to establish a government to protect the rights of property, and to establish schools which should encourage the virtue of its care." To foster universal education, its cost should be cheap, and to insure that democracy is ruled by an "elite drawn from the whole," Rush, like Jefferson, wished to deny suffrage to illiterates. John Adams, who had misgivings about the democratic process, wrote in similar vein to Rush on February 6, 1805: "I cannot help thinking Democracy is a distemper of this kind [epidemic disease] and when it is once set in motion and obtains a majority, it converts everything good, bad, and indifferent into the dominant epidemic."

Much of Rush's educational philosophy is epitomized in a letter to Dr. Richard Price, an eminent British scholar who was deeply interested in the development of the young republic. Rush asked Dr. Price to use his pen to influence prominent Americans in behalf of compulsory elementary education, training competent schoolmasters, establishing colleges in each state, and founding a national university that would specialize in politics and international law.

In 1787, Rush wrote a broadside "To the Citizens of Philadelphia: A Plan for Free Schools," in which he proposed that the common people be educated to make them sufficiently civil to live in an ordered society. Taxes to support the schools should be

equitably levied. And to motivate a proper moral tone in the schools, ministers of the prevailing sects should supervise the schools of their respective orders.

English would be taught by the phonetic method. Parents, upon request, could have their children study German. Athletics for the boys and music and dancing for the girls would satisfy their non-academic needs. An educated public is the best deterrent to crime, said Rush, and he preached "that the price of a bottle of wine will pay the tax of an ordinary freeholder for a whole year of those schools."

As Surgeon-General of the Continental Army, Rush had seen much suffering. He deplored the corruption of education that had made "passion for war universal." Audaciously, he proposed that a Secretary of Peace be designated in war time to promote universal peace by establishing free schools in every city, village, and town, appointing principled and talented teachers, and developing curriculums that include religious instruction. Children would be taught that only God can destroy life "and we rebel against his authority whenever we kill for any reasons."

Rush on Elementary Instruction

Most of Rush's thoughts on elementary instruction are epitomized in three essays, "Thoughts upon the mode of Education Proper in a Republic," "A Plan for the Establishment of Public Schools," and "Thoughts upon Female Education." Also, his prolific correspondence is a plentiful source of his educational views. In brief, Rush proposed that the first eight years of the child's education be devoted to mastering written and oral English. Arithmetic and light mathematics are taught too early in life. These subjects and geography, natural history, and conversational German and French are wasted on the unready young. Above all, each child had to receive Biblical instruction to insure his safe passage from earthly piety to heavenly blessedness. For the more aspiring pupil there were academies to quench his hunger for grammar, metaphysics, history, government, and principles of agriculture and manufactures.

To John Adams, Rush wrote scornfully of Latin and Greek: "Were every Greek and Latin Book (The New Testament excepted) consumed in a bonfire, the world would be wiser and

better for it." Men use Greek and Latin "to conceal themselves from an intercourse with the common people," and to Adams's defense of the classical tongues, Rush responded with an interesting non sequiter: "I shall class them [Greek and Latin] hereafter with slavery and spiritous liquors, and consider them in a less degree, unfriendly to the progress of morals, knowledge, and religion in the United States."

The Bible to Rush was the essence of republicanism. In his view even Deists profit from the Bible and since reason has never solved political problems, Christianity alone can raise mankind from depravity. Christian indoctrination, he contended would spare American youth from being victimized by demagogues.

On Discipline

Too often schoolmasters are associated with despotism and violence. Because there is so much error in education and morals, would it not be better for all if the schools taught the art of forgetting to "schoolmasters, divines and legislators?" Rush's ideal teacher is a temperate man who treats children gently and with familiarity. He offers admonition privately and will not detain a student after school hours without parental consent. The thought of corporal punishment offended Rush. Why punish children who do not understand why they are beaten? Punishment given in anger is evil and can injure the child physically and mentally. The beaten child hates his master and himself learns to practice sadism. To discourage child beating Rush urged that laws be enacted to punish offenders. Frustrated teachers, unable to impart learning, especially the ancient tongues, become enraged, pull ears, swear, and humiliate the perplexed students.

As substitutes for too much indulgence in wasteful sports, hunting, and fishing at country schools, Rush recommended student participation in meaningful agricultural and mechanical hobbies. Carpentry, cabinet making, agricultural competitions, and moderate exercises were admirable complements to the academic chores required of pupils. Later, American progressives were to adopt many of Rush's humane educational propositions, but there are some even today who delight in brandishing the intimidating rod even while agonizing reports of child abuse are increasingly widespread.

On the Education of Females and Blacks

In "Thoughts upon Female Education," Rush stresses a practical course of studies for the girl's domestic, social, and religious life. An accomplished young American lady reads and writes English well and is proficient in bookkeeping, arithmetic, geography, history, and religion. To round out her personality she must be taught music and dancing and principles of good government and patriotism. Rush helped found the Young Ladies' Academy of Philadelphia, hoping that the school would play an important role in elevating the female mind. That women were thinking of equality of the sexes is apparent in a jesting letter from John Adams to Rush on the subject of the classics. Mrs. Adams is for the end of Greek and Latin study, wrote Adams, "since it would destroy the foundation of all pretension of the gentlemen to superiority over the ladies and restore liberty, equality, and fraternity between the sexes! What does Mrs. Rush think of this?"

Rush, an ardent abolitionist, believed unreservedly in the need to educate blacks. Like Franklin, he wrote: "Let the young negroes be educated in the principles of virtue and religion—let them be taught to read and write—and afterwards instructed in some business, whereby they may be able to maintain themselves." Perhaps, had Franklin and Rush been heeded on emancipation and education of the blacks in post-revolutionary times, the American races might have achieved an orderly integration that would have precluded the costly Civil War and its still unsolved aftermath.

On Medical Education

Although in the light of modern knowledge Rush's medical lore seems medieval, he was nevertheless a sincere practitioner and an inspiring teacher. Certainly, the following extract from one of his medical essays is modern in tone and guiltless of scientific anachronism:

> Let us strip our profession of everything that looks like mystery and imposition, and clothe medical knowledge in a dress so simple and intelligible that it may become a part of academical education in all our seminaries of learning. . . . In thus recommending the general diffusion of medical knowledge, by an academical education, let it not be supposed that I wish to see the exercise of medicine abolished as a regular profession.

Rush was outspoken in his criticism of faulty medical education. A graduate of Edinburgh, he later taught clinical medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, which he thought inferior to Edinburgh's famed medical school. In January, 1817, he informed the trustees of the university that the medical course was superficial, that students were frequently absent from lectures, and that their knowledge of elementary medical practices was limited. Many passed diluted courses after several days of grinding for examinations. Besides, there were too many doctors, since only eight months of attendance at lectures qualified a man for a degree. Rush asked the medical schools to impose higher standards for medical matriculants and urged that the profession be vigilant in its search for fraudulent degree mills.

Rush on Higher Education

Rush devoted thirty years of his life to the fortunes of Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. On September 9, 1873, the legislature enacted a bill to subsidize the new college, named after John Dickinson, President of the Senate, and an influential supporter of the college.

Rush hoped that the new college would calm the political factions in the state, encourage them to become more liberal politically and religiously, and promote the growth of Presbyterianism, but from the start the growth of the college was impeded by the opposition of the trustees of the College of Philadelphia and by its president, John Ewing, who was particularly vicious in his diatribes against Rush and Dickinson College.

A discreet administrator, Rush chose a conservative board of trustees, induced a reluctant faculty to migrate to Carlisle's unsophisticated environs, raised funds in hard times, and planned the school's plant and curriculum. Dickinson offered Latin, Greek, philology, oratory, history, chronology, myths of antiquity, moral and political philosophy, mathematics, and natural sciences, but Rush's favorite subject, theology, was voted out by the trustees. Examinations were administered orally.

Rush opposed college dormitories; like monasteries, they led to immoralities. When he sent his son John to the College of New Jersey, he refused to have him reside at the college, since he considered "a college life and college society to boys of his age as alike fatal to morals and manners." Alas, precautions of the

good doctor were futile, for only three months after boarding with a private family near the college, John was discovered playing cards on the sabbath, a heinous offense in those days. Although he and his rascally companions confessed to their crimes before the congregated college, the aggrieved doctor withdrew his repentant son from the college, attributing John's downfall to his "living away from his family and female society."

Rush was saddened by the continued political opposition to Dickinson College. He reflected that "colleges like children . . . are not borne without labor pains. But all will end well. Our brat will repay us after all the trouble it has given us." But the brat continued to be troublesome. In 1810 Rush asked for an increase in tuition rates, rationalizing his departure from his previous educational liberalism to a colleague: "Let a learned education become a luxury in our country," he wrote, "for should learning become universal it would be as destructive to civilization as universal barbarism," a sentiment presently expressed by opponents of open enrollment.

Rush's problems with Dr. Charles Nisbet, whom he had chosen to head Dickinson, are similar to the problems Franklin had had with Dr. William Smith at the Philadelphia Academy. A learned divine from Scotland, Dr. Nisbet was an expert linguist who had come to Carlisle at Rush's invitation. The good reverend had migrated to Carlisle reluctantly and he probably did not enjoy being escorted on July 4, 1783, from Yellow Breeches Creek to Boiling Springs by Carlisle's troop of light horse. Soon disenchanted with Dickinson because of its limited financial support, Nisbet grew angry with Rush, whom he accused of misrepresenting the alleged universal respect of the ministry for him and for the supposed absence of crime and violence in America. Two years later, Nisbet wrote to the Earl of Buchan that the trustees were ignorant, the teachers mere day laborers, and the students apathetic.

By summer 1786, Rush rued that he had brought Nisbet to Dickinson. Nisbet, he said, whined too much and had grown too autocratic an administrator. But unhappy as he was, Nisbet stayed on, probably enjoying Rush's discomfiture, and piloted Dickinson from 1786 until 1804, eliciting from the grudging Rush the admission that Dickinson was flourishing, boasting of students from many states and a graduating class of twenty.

Now that Dickinson was faring well, Rush turned to the found-

ing of a college for the sons of the large German population of Pennsylvania. Fearing that as unenlightened farmers they would be pawns of political and medical quacks, he appealed for their educational support in a paper, "To the Citizens of Pennsylvania of German Birth." Rush asked them to found a college of their own, to adopt English as a co-equal of German, and to participate in scholarly activities as well as in farming. His shibboleth, "religion without superstition, learning without pedantry, and liberty without licentiousness" sums up his educational credo admirably. In 1787, Franklin College at Lancaster opened its doors to its first freshman class, a predominantly German speaking assemblage of farmers' sons. Rush had scored again!

But one of Rush's dearest dreams, the dream of Joel Barlow and George Washington also, to set up a federal university has not yet been realized. The university would recruit young men of impeccable character and outstanding talent for careers in national and international service. The course of study would include political science, government, international law, universal history, practical natural philosophy and chemistry, manufactures, commerce, mathematics, natural history, French, German, philology, and physical education.

Rush was an ambitious educator. He envisioned educational systems that would unite the country, reward ambitious students, instill them with piety, extend the frontiers of knowledge, and encourage the nurture of the arts and the industries. He labored tirelessly to found colleges, abolish slavery, and root out disease. He was not always right in education and medicine but his intentions were altruistic, his teaching inspiring, and his contributions significant.

NOAH WEBSTER, SCHOOLMASTER TO THE NATION (1758-1843)

A schoolteacher for ten years after his graduation from Yale College in 1778, Noah Webster wrote prolifically on medical, literary, historical, religious, and political themes in his long and productive life. However, his chief claim to fame is his authorship of spellers and dictionaries that were bought by the millions by American schoolchildren and their parents. Webster met Rush in Philadelphia in 1786. Rush, a Jeffersonian republican and Webster, a Federalist who veered toward extreme conservatism, had similar views on the origins of plagues. Webster's statistical studies of epidemiology led him to believe that epidemics are caused by atmospheric conditions, a theory likewise entertained by Rush. Both men supported *The Medical Repository*, the first American medical journal, but Webster's medical interests waned in favor of his linguistic passions. A student of language for forty-three years, he devoted twenty-eight of them to the completion of *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828). By 1783 he had achieved phenomenal success with his famous *Blue-Back Speller*, America's most widely read school book. Aiming to emancipate the American language from its English traditions, Webster filled the little book with patriotic passages designed to instill an intense nationalistic sentiment in the minds of his young readers.

Politically, Webster strove diligently to shape a strong federal government tinged with aristocratic biases. Although his *Sketches of American Policy* (1785) was indebted to Rousseau for its egalitarian inclusions, the book, which was read by Washington and

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Madison, argued for a strong federal government supported by a constitution and an educational system consonant with America's specific needs. Webster believed later that the book had inspired the constitutional convention, but Madison regarded *Sketches of American Policy* as only one of many similar proposals for establishing a strong central government.

While teaching at an academy in Philadelphia in 1787, Webster met Washington and other delegates at the convention. Inspired by the proceedings, Webster became a publicist for the Constitution. In the *Minerva* which he edited, he supported Washington, advocated Federalist causes, and helped build a nucleus of American folklore. He opposed a bill of rights, declaring that an educated yeomanry needed no legislation to secure the rights of the populace.

After the French Revolution, Webster began to doubt the virtues of republicanism. Jefferson's support of the French Revolution disturbed him. In "A Letter to the President of the United States," Webster scathingly denounced Jefferson's "factitious reputation" which the more intelligent classes recognized. Boldly, he addressed Jefferson as a "superficial philosopher—an ambitious, but weak politician; just fitted to be the nominal leader of a faction and pushed forward . . . by those who wish to enjoy the benefits without bearing the responsibilities of public measures."

Alienated from the democratic sentiment sweeping the land, Webster opposed equal suffrage, popular democracy, and the licentious press. In 1838 he repudiated much of his youthful liberalism, denounced Rousseau, crossed out his passages on religion in *Sketches of American Policy*, and fumed against the spoils system. But even before this, in 1802, he had written almost as bitterly as John Adams had, "that the turbulence of the democratic spirit is a violent disease, incident to free states. Unfortunately, republics do not guaranty altruistic behavior in their leaders. Electors are easily corrupted, and when the sources of power are corrupted, the evil hardly admits of a remedy."

The American republic, reasoned Webster, must base its strength on respect for property, representative democracy, a strong constitution, and a system of education to harness the popular will and "provide effective protection for people and property." Disillusioned in 1800 about the ability of the people to govern themselves, he wrote to Rush that it would be best, per-

haps, to disenfranchise the ignorant masses who follow demagogues blindly. By 1837 he was more convinced of the rectitude of his conservatism, writing to Daniel Webster that "a great mass of people cannot properly judge of what constitutes a good chief magistrate." In addition, men of little or no property should not have the right to judge the affairs of propertied men. He deplored the anti-intellectualism that was threatening to destroy the colleges since the uneducated masses regarded the colleges as the agencies of wealth and aristocracy.

Although he never directly affected national policies, Webster planted patriotic and nationalistic seeds of thought in his textbooks that rooted in the collective consciousness of tens of millions of schoolchildren. He ardently thought that he was schoolmaster to the nation, an educational messiah who would guide the nation to contentment. But to effect his plan he would have to correct the nation's educational weaknesses. Some states had no provisions for the education of the poor. For example, Virginia had no free schools, her academies were bad, and her college students whiled their time away at taverns, plays, and racetracks. There was a want of good textbooks, especially in history, geography, and heroic biography. Grammar was taught pitifully by incompetent teachers who believed that it was sound pedagogy to teach children Latin first to have them excel in English.

In a letter to Dr. Priestley, Webster conceded that American colleges were destitute of books and equipment, that undergraduates race for gain, subordinating learning to desire for wealth and status. Yet, had there not been a noticeable advance in American agriculture and technology in comparatively few years? American industries, agriculture, science, arts, and philosophy had made appreciable strides, and education in the eastern states had progressed more rapidly than anywhere else in the land.

Webster's Educational Aims

Webster spelled out his educational goals in the introduction to his speller. America must be selective in borrowing from the wisdom of the nations. Let the old world retain its archaisms and prejudices. American children must be taught to love their country and to cherish its emerging language which he hoped would synchronize with the unique traits of American government.

Given the proper school books, and Webster obviously had his own in mind, children would read inspired patriotic anecdotes, tales of heroism, and classic American speech that would endear their country to them. To isolate them from contaminating foreign influences, he advised that older students be discouraged from studying abroad.

Like so many other Founding Fathers, Webster preached the need for a general diffusion of knowledge to "guard against the approaches of corruption, the prevalence of religious error, and against the open assault of external foes." Education insures the stability of property and the perpetuation of freedom. To provide for themselves all men should read and write well and have some skill with mathematics. Mastering these, they can more readily follow their inclinations to gain profitable places in society. But, he cautioned, a man cannot be called educated if he is unacquainted with ethics, law, commerce, money, and government.

In his *Fugitive Essays* Webster asked that each district provide children with at least four months of schooling annually. Their teachers were to be carefully screened from a selected pool of candidates. Oddly, for a man so dedicated to learning, Webster opposed the establishment of school libraries, since many of the library books would be of little value to poor schoolchildren who would find physical exercise more useful to prepare them for trades in mechanics and agriculture than reading books that would make them slothful, desirous of becoming gentlemen, and tempt them away from useful labor. Books cannot supply children with dexterity that experience alone can endow them with.

Religious and Moral Education

Like Rush, Webster was a pious man. But unlike Rush, he opposed Bible reading in school, which he charged was "a prostitution of divine truth for secular purposes." Too frequent use of the Bible lessens its significance. Similarly, he opposed oath-taking for office, since a dishonest man might take the oath merely for gain. Webster had embraced Calvinism in 1807, but as an undergraduate at Yale he had almost lost his religion because of the vicious and profane language of his classmates. In "Letters to a Young Man Commencing His Education" (1823), Webster advised him to reinforce his reason through revelation. Follow the ten commandments, read the best books on morals, literature, the

arts and the sciences, but avoid, he cautioned, plays, novels, romances, and informal writings which are wasteful and corrupting.

When the Girard College for Orphans opened in Philadelphia in 1836, Webster deplored its omission of religious teaching "which must be the basis of any government intended to secure the rights of a free people." Like Rush, he believed that the clergy should be included "in any concern in the education of youth in a literary institute," a view not shared by Franklin, Washington, Jefferson, or Madison. Webster's *Speller* reveals his educational parochialism as these excerpts indicate:

No man may put off the law of God,
My joy is in his law all day.

We must pray for them that hate us,
We must love them that love us not.

What is the reward of the peace-maker?
He shall be blessed and called the son of God.

Webster on the Education of Females

Webster championed the education of females, since they influence the young, inspire men and restrain their passions, and encourage graciousness in social relationships. But women must never usurp men's roles in the professions. In brief, girls should be taught to speak and write elegantly, appreciate fine literature, and keep accounts. To imbue them with civic pride, they should be taught history and geography, and to develop their social graces they should be taught music, drawing, and dancing. Because women are by nature intellectually inferior to men they should not dabble in scholarship. Graciousness, sentimentality, and subservience—female traits—do not promote intellectual achievement. Above all, he counseled American parents, do not send your daughters to demoralizing boarding schools and discourage them from reading novels that damage female virtue.

Webster on Teaching

Webster taught reading, writing, literature, geography, vocal music, and the English language at Sharon, Connecticut, for nine shillings per student. In "Modes of Teaching the English Language," he supported Rush's view that children are put to their studies too early, especially in arithmetic, geography, and

history. Latin and Greek should be taught to future professionals, but mechanics, laborers, and farmers would not profit from their mastery. Later in life he urged the study of ancient cultures from which "the best modern writers have drawn the finest parts of their productions."

American teachers were not an enviable lot. In 1788 Webster wrote, "Many of our schools are kept by men of no breeding, and many of them, by men infamous for the most delectable vices." Teachers of English were bores, responsible for much of the chaos in education. Striking a modern note, he asked that students evaluate their teachers and that those masters revealed as unloved, unhonored, and unrespected be dismissed. Because of the poor salaries paid to teachers, the more talented college graduates enter the ministry or the other professions. Unfortunately, the public will not pay for teachers who are learned, pleasant, and good disciplinarians.

Webster withdrew his own children from a day school at New Haven, Connecticut, because their teacher arbitrarily took their smoked glasses from them as they prepared to watch an eclipse of the sun. Although he criticized tyrannical teachers, Webster himself was attacked in 1785 as "a proud, inconsistent pedant," and in 1787 he was again criticized by a former colleague as a poor and overbearing teacher. Webster replied to the latter charge "that he was bred in a part of America where men of the best character and education are permitted to take schools," a defense which has obvious syllogistic weakness. Jefferson, whom Webster had attacked in 1802 as a poor demagogue and as a poor writer unaware of the nature of grammatical antecedents, in turn denounced Webster as "a mere pedagogue, of a very limited understanding," an appraisal which historian Adolphe E. Meyer wryly speculates "is based no doubt more on Webster's Federalist predilections than on his orthographic bolshevism."

Webster and the Americanization of English

Webster labored his entire life to emancipate the American language from its classical and English heritage. The United States, a seething melting pot, could not afford differences of accent or language. Aiming to define words in American rather than English terms, he wrote and lectured on the distinct characteristics of American speech, the history of the English language,

its orthography, and the need to eliminate variant dialects. Strong in his attack upon English linguistic authority, he dared attack Johnson's famed *Dictionary* for including thousands of un-English words such as *dignotion, opiniatry,* and *incompossible.* To insure that American students would heed his suggested reforms, he wrote successful textbooks that many millions of American students pored over until the late nineteenth century. His *Grammatical Institutes of the English Language* appeared in three parts: the speller in 1783, the grammar in 1784, and the reader in 1785. His important *Dissertation upon the English Language* was published in 1806; and his world famous *American Dictionary of the English Language* in 1828. About one hundred million copies of the now scarce *Blue-Back Speller,* as the first part of the *Grammatical Institutes* was popularly called, have been sold, and as late as 1880, publishers reported an annual sale of 1,000,000 copies. The speller simplified spelling and corrected vulgarisms in pronunciation. Its popularity led to spelling crazes—spelling bees, contests, and matches. The sway of the speller first weakened in New England, but its popularity increased in the South and the West until the Civil War.

Encouraged by his friend Joel Barlow to write a popular grammar that would surpass the standard works of Bishop Lowth and Horne Tooke in quality and interesting presentation, Webster turned out part two of *The Grammatical Institute,* but the grammar included traditional methodology—memorization of rules, parsing, and correction of false syntax, certainly not effective techniques to correct his competitors' books, which he said "introduce more errors than they correct."

Webster's readers included patriotic selections, addresses of congressmen, and essays about Americans like Benjamin Franklin and Joel Barlow. The books stressed elocution, moral lessons, and the arts of "Narration," "Speaking," and "Dialogue." *The Little Reader's Assistant* (1790) included stories, rudiments of English grammar, a catechism of the Federal Constitution, and numerous passages on husbandry. The stories were illustrated, sometimes gruesomely. Farming was lauded as the most necessary, healthful, innocent, and agreeable of professions. But even the *Reader's* high moral tone was not sufficient to satisfy teachers and parents who objected to the decreasing religious content in subsequent editions.

CONCLUSION

Although Benjamin Rush is less well known to Americans than either Franklin or Noah Webster, his name is appearing more frequently in histories of education as well as in general and medical history. His pioneering in public education, his founding of colleges, his interest in education of blacks, his concern for peace education, and his dream of a federal university entitle him to fuller recognition as an important educator than he has hitherto been accorded. The piety he invoked at Dickinson and Franklin Colleges probably was emulated by other educators, and it is reasonable to assume that he was in part responsible for the moral tone that prevailed in American colleges until the Civil War.

Both Rush and Webster favored religious instruction in the schools, but Webster feared that daily Bible study would alienate children from religion. Webster, who has been called the father of the American census, had faith in his ability to influence American education. In a letter to John Canfield, he wrote: "America must be as independent in literature as in politics, as famous for its arts as for arms; and it is not impossible but a person of my youth may have some influence in exciting a spirit of literary industry."

Webster lived long enough to receive accolades from his peers and many of his pragmatic views were adopted by later educators. The first edition of his speller antedated Washington's presidency and the last was contemporaneous with Theodore

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Roosevelt. He helped free America from her sense of intellectual inferiority and his participation in the war of the dictionaries helped promote English courses in the curriculum. His interest in creating an American language was vindicated by Henry Louis Mencken in *The American Language* and by scores of American linguists and grammarians who have agreed with Webster's crusade for a distinct American language.

Franklin, like Rush and Webster, had a lifelong interest in education. Inventor, philosopher, scientist, statesman, author, and educator, Franklin was without benefit of academe, America's finest product in the critical years of America's birth and childhood. His wisdom, tact, and humor influenced his sometimes despairing colleagues positively. His presence at Independence Hall undoubtedly steeled the will of the delegates to distill a powerful political essence from the amplitude of ideas, some effervescent, some substantial, that they heatedly conceived in creative debates.

Franklin's academy, Junto, library, pamphlets, almanacs, scientific papers, political essays, and humorous pieces influenced the young nation's destiny appreciably. Although his accolades for self-education in *Poor Richard's Almanac* might have harmed the movement for public education, it is difficult to estimate whether the philosophy of self-help actually turned people away from plans for mass education. Perhaps the adult education movement in America stemmed from Franklin's Junto of artisans and tradesmen who diligently learned for learning's sake.

All three men became more conservative politically and educationally as they aged. Webster, like so many Englishmen and Americans who saw the Reign of Terror in France as the antithesis of the ideals of the French Revolution, feared democracy in his later years. Rush gradually lost faith in the potential of the masses to benefit from higher learning, advocating instead an elitist clientele for the colleges. Webster, and in his later years, Franklin, praised the classics, but Rush consistently opposed them as handmaidens of the devil.

Franklin and Rush sympathized with the enslaved blacks, writing for their emancipation and education. Webster's attitude on emancipation was economic, not idealistic. Slavery would die out in the land when its practice would be unprofitable.

Although Rush as a physician, Franklin as a statesman, and Webster as a linguist and political commentator sincerely be-

lieved in education as a civilizer, they were deeply steeped in Locke's equating of property with happiness. Education would help maintain an orderly society based on respect for property and the governing bodies. Yet, Franklin and Rush were not fixed in their social thinking by their middle-class values. Rush and Franklin wrote against war, Franklin going so far as to say that "there never was a good war or a bad peace." Both men desired to free and educate the slaves. Rush wrote against the death penalty and argued for the enactment of humane penal laws. His attempt to reform medical education at the University of Pennsylvania was an early anticipation of Abraham Flexner's milestone report on medical schools early in the twentieth century.

Much of what they fought for is reality today. Modern education is multifaceted. Modern languages have almost completely effaced the classic tongues. Black and female education are no longer burning issues. The cry for peace so eloquently aired by Rush and Webster is still raised by contemporary thinkers, but the cry is unheeded in a world ringed with silos hosting pernicious harvests. How would our Founding Fathers, including Franklin, Rush, and Webster, react were they to return to earth for a day to see what education has wrought and what still remains for future generations to achieve?

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